

HOME AND SOCIETY.

Notes on Reading.

MR. EDWARD EVERETT HALE tells us that he once knew a young man, who afterward became insane, who was so impressed with his own ignorance that he went to the college librarian and asked him at which end of the library it was customary for students to begin. And Mr. Charles Dudley Warner tells us that a college professor not long ago informed him "that a freshman came to him, after he had been recommending certain books in the literature class, and said he had never read a book in his life. This was literally true. Except his text-books, he had never read a book. He had passed a fair examination, but of reading he knew no more than a Kafir."

The first thing one notices is that very few people read, in the exact sense of the word. "Reading and writing come by nature" is as true of the one as it is of the other; and while an enormous proportion of the people of these United States are capable of the physical act of reading, and do, indeed, practice it now and then, so far as to read the market reports or the deaths and marriages, only a few are habitual readers. And even of these, how many are there who read anything besides cheap fiction—cheap, I mean, in quality,—the ready-made literature turned out by the fiction-mills? In the public libraries, seventy per cent. of the books taken out in the course of a year is cheap fiction; and the cheap fiction which gets itself between the covers of a book and upon the shelves of a library is not one-half of that which runs its course in the columns of some weekly story-paper. Now it is not right to call the consumers of stuff like this readers. Charles Lamb speaks of books which are not books, so these are readers who are not readers. They read with the eye alone, while the brain is inert.

This class is far harder to deal with than the still larger class which, like the collegians Mr. Hale and Mr. Warner tell us about, have never made any use of the power of reading which was hammered into them in the primary school. The man who has rarely opened a book may be induced to do so; and he may be so gratified with his discovery of the pleasure and profit which he found in reading that he will never give it up. Those who do not read can only be got to read by giving them something which will interest them sufficiently to make them want to read it through when they have once begun. And what will interest a man depends altogether on the man. In literature, as in dietetics, what is one man's meat is another man's poison. One thing may be said most emphatically: never give any "improving books" to a man who does not read; to do so is to waste your effort and his. When the reading habit is once formed, you may, perhaps, get him interested in a tract or in a religious biography of the ordinary Sunday-school type. But no such book will ever tempt him to go on reading for its own sake.

The rule is simple: study the man or the woman or the child, and put before him or her the book he or she is most likely to begin, and having begun,

most likely to finish. In all probability, the firemen around the corner, whose little library you are trying to increase and improve, will not take so kindly to Shakspeare; but Tom Hughes's "Alfred the Great," and Higginson's "Young Folk's History of America,"—the best little book of its kind I ever saw,—and Nordhoff's "Politics for Young Americans," and a good collection of miscellaneous poems—these are the books they are likely to look at, and in all probability to read. You cannot cure a boy of reading the "Bold Brigand of the Dead Gulch" by giving him the "Student's Hume,"—one of the driest books which ever made a boy thirsty,—or any of the ordinary old-fashioned text-books of history. But you might get him to give up "Lone-eyed Jim, the Boy Scout," to read one of Mayne Reid's stories; and from those the transition is easy to the sea-tales of Cooper and Marryat—two salt-water romancers far healthier than most of the rose-water novelists of to-day. And after you have got the boy interested in these sea-fighters of fiction, let him have Southey's "Life of Nelson," a good biography of Paul Jones, and, if the size of it does not frighten him, Cooper's "History of the American Navy."

The one essential thing to do, when you are trying to change a man who does not read into a man who does read, is to put yourself in his place. What is his business? What are his tastes? What are his surroundings? The answers to these questions suggest the weak points in his indifference. If he is an artisan who gives his evenings to the reading of a weekly story-paper, and so has the freshness taken out of his mind by its cheap fiction, suggest his trying Charles Reade's "Put Yourself in his Place"; and if this story of strikes interest him, lend him Reade's other novels, most of which are so manly, and touch so closely on questions of history and politics, that the reader is tempted to learn more about what the novelist has thus enticingly alluded to. If a lady has a strong taste for the theater, suggest her reading Dr. Doran's "Their Majesties' Servants,"—the most amusing as it is the most authoritative of stage-histories,—and insist on her reading Lewes's "Actors and Acting," the one good book on a difficult subject. If she like these, then she may begin on the grand line of English histrionic biographies which begins with Colley Cibber's "Apology," and comes down to Macready's "Reminiscences."

A course of reading is like an encyclopedia; it is meant to take in everything. Now, anybody who believes that he can take in everything will be "taken in" himself. The mass of accumulated knowledge is now enormous, and to take even a cursory view of it all is only possible for a very well-educated man. To know something of everything is getting, day by day, to be a harder task. But to know almost everything about something is more nearly within everybody's reach. To know absolutely everything on a given subject is not possible even to the specialist, but to get a good grasp of a subject, be it scientific, or historical, or literary, to know what is best worth knowing about it—this can

be done by almost anybody with good will and a little perseverance. Now, the way to master a subject is to begin at the beginning. Suppose you want to know about Greek literature. You have noted one of Macaulay's or Matthew Arnold's glowing tributes to the noble simplicity of Grecian writing, and you want to read about it. Get Jebb's "Primer of Greek Literature," which is almost as good as Stopford Brooke's "Primer of English Literature"—as high praise as one can give any book of the kind. This will tell you the conditions under which the Greeks worked. Then if you are attracted toward any other writer, and want to know more about him, get the volume in which he and his works are discussed at length in the series of "Ancient Classics for English Readers." By the time you have read that, you will know whether you really want to study this Greek author or not, whether you are capable of appreciating him, and, therefore, whether your time and attention can be given to him with advantage.

As soon as the taste for reading is formed, that taste begins to improve, and its improvement should be sedulously cultivated. Every man who has read a great deal will tell you that he has left far behind him the books he admired when he began. What he admired at twenty is far inferior to what he admires at thirty or forty. He is constantly going up a literary ladder. Now, it makes little matter on what round of the ladder the reader begins, so long as he climbs. It is the act of climbing which is beneficial, not the elevation attained. If you are a boy, and you read for excitement, for adventure, and for this reason take a story-paper, give it up, and try one of Mr. Towle's series of books about the "Heroes of History," or one of Dr. Eggleston's "Lives of Famous Indians." If Mr. Towle's "Pizarro" attracts you, go from that to Prescott's narrative of the conquest of Peru; and from that you may be led to his other histories of the Spanish dominion in America, and Prescott may thus introduce you to Irving and to Motley. And when you have got so far, the whole field of European history is open before you. Get the best—the best, that is, that you can read with satisfaction, and then go onward and upward. One caution may be thrown out here. When you want to know about any man or period and seek a history to tell you, do not take a school-book; they are only too often dry and colorless.

And this brings us to those who know what to read, but desire advice as to how to get the best results from their reading. Having formed the habit of reading, and having thus got your foot on the ladder of literary culture, how are you to get the best result from these? First of all, always think over a book when you have finished it. Criticise it.

Form your own opinion of it. If you liked it, ask yourself why you liked it. If you disliked it, ask yourself why you did not like it. See if the fault was in the book or in you. If you were greatly interested, try to find out whether this was due to the author or to the subject. Then if you can find somebody else who has read the book, talk it over; exchange your impression for his impression; and see whether, on sober second thought, he is more nearly right than you. If you have been reading a great author, see what the great critics have been saying of him. If you have been reading an essay on a great author or a biography of him, take up his own works next, that you may gain the benefit of the interest around about him. If you have been reading any special history, try to see how it fits into the general history of the world: and for this purpose, I know no books to be compared with Mr. Freeman's "Primer of European History," and his "First Sketch of History." These begin at the beginning and tell the march of events to our generation.

Then, as you are reading a book, it is well to mark important passages. If the book is your own, make a light mark with a hard pencil in the margin of the passage. If the book is not yours, put in a slip of paper. When you have ended the book, read over the marked passages, and index those which on this second reading seem worthy of it, or likely in any way to be of use to you. If the book is yours, turn to the blank page at the end and give a hint of the passage and the page it is on; thus:

John Brown, p. 21,

Shakspearean quotation, p. 47,

Anecdote of a wise dog, p. 93,

and so on. If the book is not yours, take a page in a note-book, or a sheet of note-paper, and make your index on that, heading it with the title of the book.

The Rev. Joseph Cook tells us that he marks important passages with a line in the outer margin of the book he is reading, more important with two lines, and most important with three; while passages that he disagrees with or disapproves of, are marked in like manner with one, two, or three lines on the inner margin. He advises the committing to memory of the passages marked with three lines on the outside margin. The reader should also strenuously cultivate the habit of searching diligently in dictionaries and encyclopedias and gazetteers, and in whatever books of reference he can get access to. He should let no allusion pass without an effort to find out what it means. Macaulay bristles with allusions, but there are scarcely any that a quick reader cannot dig out of an encyclopedia in a few minutes. And "when found make a note on,"—as Cap'n Cuttle tells us.

Arthur Penn.

THE WORLD'S WORK.

Progress in Smoke Abatement.

THE necessity of getting rid of the clouds of black smoke that overhang all towns where bituminous coal is used in domestic fires, has led to the invention of a

large number of new stoves and fire-places. In all these inventions the aim is to prevent the formation of smoke by a more complete combustion of the fuel. Smoke is simply a fine dust composed of